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## The Army Should Embrace A2/AD — A Rebuttal

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October 3, 2013 | COL Vincent Alcazar

In July, in a Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) and U.S. Army War College (USAWC) Press editorial, Dr. Alex Crowther writes that the U.S. Army should embrace Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD).<sup>1</sup> In strict terms, I agree with Dr. Crowther's proposition: the Department of the Army should "embrace" A2/AD; however, I disagree with the case he constructs as to why the U.S. Army should embrace A2/AD and in what role. I will point out why Dr. Crowther's proposed role for the Army in countering A2/AD is unwise; furthermore, that Dr. Crowther's case is built upon a highly questionable foundation, "Offshore Control."

Dr. Crowther's position is that the Department of the Army should team with the Department of the Navy and the Department of the Air Force to bring Army competencies and a specific future Army capability to bear on A2/AD adversaries while leveraging Offshore Control.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Crowther's statement that the Army should embrace A2/AD points out the need to make land warfare force redevelopment decisions sooner rather than later. Moreover, the Army could exploit the intellectual momentum of its capstone concepts on the role of land warfare forces within integrated Joint Force concepts of employment that overcome A2/AD capabilities which could, in turn, aid the Joint Force in expanding its freedom of action against an A2/AD adversary.

However, Dr. Crowther's editorial must be reconsidered for several important reasons.<sup>3</sup> First, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Chief of Staff of the Army force development vectors are both for an Army and Joint Force "to-be" with a 2020 focal point.<sup>4</sup> A new offensive missile system as described by Dr. Crowther may not, owing to the lengthy development and acquisition processes of today, attain full operational capability for 1 to 2 decades. That timeline would put such a system in the field in sufficient quantity likely after 2025. What complicates that development timeline is

not the challenge of pioneering new technology, rather, the need to mitigate A2/AD **today**. Going forward, overcoming A2/AD requires ideas and urgent action to ensure U.S. deterrence and regional influence remain robust and unshaken by A2/AD. More importantly, there is no guarantee now that any of the governments listed by Dr. Crowther would support the domestic basing of offensive missile systems then. There is much to suggest that those specific governments have a kind of susceptibility to domestic political pressure in which any support for stationing offensive missile systems aimed at another regional regime is already tenuous or could rapidly diminish altogether.

Second, Dr. Crowther acknowledges likely opposition to a U.S. Army offensive missile system purposed to perform sea control—a mission that according to the latest iteration of *Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 5100.01*, is performed by the Department of Navy.<sup>5</sup> The missions and roles ramifications alone of Dr. Crowther's proposal seem to suggest an advocacy for poaching a core Department of Navy competency, that of sea (maritime) control. There is much in the DoD roles and missions debates of the last 30 years, including the current national defense dynamic, that suggests the U.S. Navy will vigorously oppose any effort to share sea control with another service, especially if that service has fought no recent wars at sea.

Third, development of a long-range surface attack missile system as advocated by Dr. Crowther would be a clear abrogation of the 300-mile range limitation of missile systems imposed by the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Range Treaty.<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that every administration since President Reagan has remained married to the INF for its implications to the NATO alliance and consequences for European security. Dr. Crowther does not articulate the approach whereby U.S. leaders develop an offensive missile system without simultaneously describing the calculus for mitigating likely adverse Russian reaction.

Next, as mentioned in the introduction, Dr. Crowther's case rests upon the weak foundation of offshore control, a notion described in a 2012 essay by Dr. T. X. Hammes.<sup>7</sup> There are a host of reasons why offshore control is unadvised; however, in the interests of brevity, only four offshore control counterpoints will be outlined here. First, in a persuasive Letort Paper published in 2010, authored by Dr. Ryan Clarke, the practicality of a distant U.S. naval blockade undertaken against the People's Republic of China (PRC) is examined.<sup>8</sup> I will not reprise all of Dr. Clarke's findings, but the following bears mention:

The United States cannot enforce a naval blockade that would starve China of energy resources. A failed

attempt to do so would impair the prestige of U.S. power and damage U.S. diplomacy and the nation's global standing. Moreover, China is steadily reducing its dependence on sea transport and in the process rendering its supply lines less vulnerable to naval interdiction.<sup>9</sup>

While Dr. Clarke acknowledged a point made by Dr. Hammes that the PRC's overseas sources of energy, especially crude oil, are and have been perceived by PRC leaders as a national vulnerability, Dr. Clarke successfully argued that a distant naval blockade to exploit Chinese access to its international energy sources—a centerpiece of offshore control, is undesirable, unsupportable, and likely unexecutable in the form Dr. Hammes described. One would have to analyze in detail—work not accomplished in Dr. Hammes' essay—the ability of the U.S. Navy program of record going forward to conduct a distant naval blockade on a scale and to a sufficient level of effectiveness in the maritime commons of the western Pacific, Indian Ocean, and Arabian Sea adequate to compel changes in Chinese policy and behavior elsewhere. In and of itself, there is much in contemporary Chinese politics to indicate that any such blockade would ignite a rocket motor of nationalistic Chinese fervor inviting swift retribution.

A second reason why offshore control should be scuttled is its misdirection of Joint Force power toward perhaps the least threatening element of PRC military power—its maritime capacity. If, as Dr. Clarke points out, America would not undertake, let alone attempt to maintain, a successful distant blockade and the PRC navy remains the minor element of Chinese combat power, then there is within offshore control either a misanalysis of a PRC center of gravity or it lacks wholeness and coherence. While there is much in Dr. Clarke's work which speaks to the weaknesses of the PLAN (maritime power), the point I raise is that U.S. countering force should be focused on valued, vital PRC strengths, most notably on an important and visible Chinese investment, its brand of airpower.<sup>10</sup> While in offshore control, Dr. Hammes appears to be playing off the asymmetries in U.S. and PRC maritime capabilities, Dr. Crowther would leverage offshore control to advocate for PRC naval facility targeting, this is in contrast to a lack of advocacy for kinetic strikes on sovereign territory in offshore control. In any event, in countering A2/AD, it is not just the ascendance of Chinese airpower but Iranian, North Korean, and even Russian variants of airpower that make the countering of it not only a U.S. defensive imperative, but a Joint Force offensive priority. Inevitably, that imperative brings discussion back to the 800-pound gorilla in the room: U.S. attacks on an opponent's sovereign territory. Deterrence logic suggests that the ability to hold valued sites at risk of attack is perhaps the most productive path to convincing an adversary that costs of aggression exceed rewards. Furthermore, America should not place adversaries on the opposite end of ambiguous U.S. policies that preconceive and preemptively

limit what America can or would do. As Keith Payne points out, lacking clarity and failing to ensure America was understood produced large adversary strategic miscalculations that in some cases caused 20th-century wars, perhaps some of them avoidable.<sup>11</sup>

Third, offshore control exhibits a fundamental flaw in that it fails to mitigate the key strategic effect of A2/AD: thwarted projection of the Joint Force and the ensuing erosion of U.S. ability to stabilize key regions with an A2/AD hegemon. At bottom, offshore control is a naval operating concept that would operate from the perimeter of whatever oceanic area U.S. leaders estimate would remain short of the threshold of Chinese strategic nuclear response; this suggests a strategy that yielded deterrence in reverse whereby America was hamstrung. Momentarily setting aside concerns of Chinese ambiguity on nuclear use, any idea which places the Joint Force at the edge of any adversary sphere of influence must be balanced against the reality that the PRC is fielding missile systems of steadily increasing range. Today's PRC state of the art missile technology, the DF-21D, is postulated to reach out some 900 miles. What of a decade from now when a new Chinese missile system reaches 2,000 miles or beyond? We cannot be sure; perhaps those designs are already in early development. Over a longer period of time, the premises that underlie offshore control would leave America with little other strategic alternative than to back up all the way to America's west coast, thus ceding the vital portions of the Pacific to stronger Chinese influence. And what of the impact of such a retrograde strategy on America's Pacific allies? Implemented elsewhere, offshore control could yield similar regressive results opposite the Iranians in the waters and contiguous territories of the Middle East, the same for the North Koreans in northeast Asia, and encourage a resurgent Russia to adopt a more confrontational posture along Europe's flanks.

Fourth, and finally, offshore control ought to be questioned for its mischaracterization of Air-Sea Battle. Dr. Hammes asserts that, "In fact, Air-Sea Battle is the antithesis of strategy."<sup>12</sup> While Dr. Hammes' broader literary points of strategic consequences seem valid, it is important for readers to understand that Air-Sea Battle's relationship to strategy was not to impersonate a strategy. Consequently, Dr. Hammes cannot hold that Air-Sea Battle's limited scope is somehow a failure. If anything, Air-Sea Battle avoided the over-reach common to contemporary defense thinking that often tries to solve too much with rhetoric and insufficient implementation detail. Air-Sea Battle's explicit purpose was to craft a concept that described how the Joint Force—against a range of A2/AD actors, could gain and maintain effective projection of U.S. force; the very thing A2/AD as a style of warfare seeks to prevent and preclude. With a completed Air-Sea Battle concept in hand (NIA-D3), Pentagon senior leaders made decisions about how to proceed with the

ongoing integration of air and naval forces to overcome A2/AD, anywhere where A2/AD is present and U.S. vital interests could be threatened. To be clear, Air-Sea Battle is **not** an “anti-China” concept; Air-Sea Battle is an **anti-A2/AD concept**. If A2/AD best describes what the Chinese are doing, then unclouded, clear-eyed strategic reasoning should follow.

In summary, Dr. Crowther is to be commended by putting forward his proposition: the U.S. Army should “embrace” A2/AD. Undoubtedly, the Army must comprehend A2/AD as it is, doing as Clausewitz entreated, seeing it for what it is, not what they want it to be. Likewise, what makes Dr. Crowther’s subsequent points tenuous is his logic of that embrace. Dr. Crowther’s argument echoes offshore control, a likely unwise, perhaps unexecutable—and by extension, inherently ineffective approach to successfully deter and compel A2/AD actor, anywhere. Furthermore, by demonstrating that U.S. interests can be defended across various geographic contexts, the United States has in Air-Sea Battle the basis of stabilization, crisis management, and the ability to prevail in situations requiring use of armed force. Air-Sea Battle remains humble as to what it is: an explanation of counter-A2/AD operations from the tactical to the operational level.<sup>13</sup> Air-Sea Battle should not be rejected nor vilified for masquerading as anything else. In a larger sense, I submit that a strategy against A2/AD is desirable, but not the thing that we in DoD are responsible for. It is clear to these eyes that DoD must conceive the better military idea that simply ensures America can militarily protect its global vital interests. For America’s highest level political leadership, that DoD has done the necessary work to comprehend how the Joint Force can overcome any A2/AD opponent should inform diplomacy, not define it. From that, let America’s friends and allies everywhere take comfort. So it is in this era of declining U.S. defense budgets and imminent force structure reductions, American strategic to operational thinking must be able to bring to bear an approach that is sufficiently flexible to counter A2/AD—in all its likely variants. Why? A pivot to one direction may embolden an adversary somewhere else.

## ENDNOTES

1. Alex Crowther, *The Army Should Embrace A2/AD*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Opinion Editorial, July 2013, available from [www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/The-Army-Should-Embrace-A2AD/2013/07/12](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/The-Army-Should-Embrace-A2AD/2013/07/12).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

4. General Raymond Odierno, General James Amos, and Admiral William McRaven, *Strategic Landpower; Winning the Clash of Wills*, Washington, DC, p. 5, available from [www.arcic.army.mil/app\\_Documents/Strategic-Landpower-White-Paper-06MAY2013.pdf](http://www.arcic.army.mil/app_Documents/Strategic-Landpower-White-Paper-06MAY2013.pdf).

5. *Department of Defense Directive 5100.01*, Washington, DC, Department of Defense, December 21, 2010, p. 31.

6. *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics On The Elimination of Their Intermediate and Shorter Range Missiles (INF Treaty)*, Washington, DC: U.S. State Department, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance, December 8, 1987, available from [www.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm).

7. T. X. Hammes, *Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy For An Unlikely Conflict*, Washington, DC: Institute For National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, June 2012.

8. Ryan Clarke, *Chinese Energy Security: The Myth of The PLAN's Frontline Status*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, August 2010, available from [www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1012](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1012).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

10. While airpower has a clear definition within Joint Force doctrine, that definition is less useful in describing for the U.S. military audience how the PRC is using the entire spectrum of airpower instruments to deter and, if necessary, fight a conventional war. This Chinese airpower spectrum encompasses an expanding and already expansive land, air, and maritime ballistic and cruise missile force, a nascent remotely piloted vehicle force, advanced indigenously produced manned fighters, and its venerable bomber force.

11. Keith Payne, "Understanding Deterrence," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 30, 2011, p. 398.

12. Hammes, p. 2.

13. For a well-written essay on what is the theory of victory in war, see Dr. J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., "Theory of Victory," *Parameters*, Summer 2008, pp. 25-36.

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